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TAGS: PREL MARR PINR PTER TU IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQ: TALABANI MEETS TURKISH FM GUL, PROPOSES TURKISH FACT-FINDING MISSION TO KIRKUK AND JOINT COMMITTEE TO SOLVE THE PKK PROBLEM IN NORTHERN IRAQ

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ERIC EDELMAN, REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

Summary

¶1. (S/NF) Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUU) leader and former Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) member Jalal Talabani met PolMilOff June 22 and briefed on what he called his "excellent, friendly" meeting earlier that day with Turkish Deputy PM/FM Gul. He told Gul that the PUK condemned all violent PKK action against Turkey, and reported that of the 224 attendees at the last PKK/KONGRA-GEL congress in northern Iraq, more than half opposed continuing the armed struggle against Turkey, and that for the first time, PKK members were refusing to return to Turkey to carry out PKK operations. Talabani proposed to Gul the establishment of a joint committee to explore solutions to the PKK presence in northern Iraq. Talabani also suggested that Gul send a Turkish fact-finding mission to Kirkuk to learn what was really going on there. Talabani told PolMilOff that Osman Ocalan was in Mosul and that the PUK was not in contact with him, but that the U.S. was. End summary.

A Turkish Policy Shift Toward Iraqi Kurds?

¶2. (C) On June 22, PolMilOff met PUK leader and former IGC member Jalal Talabani in Ankara, where Talabani had just met with Turkish Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul. Talabani asserted the meeting was excellent and friendly. He believed that the tone reflected a new, less confrontational Turkish policy towards Iraqi Kurds and federalism in Iraq. When PolMilOff asked if Talabani had seen the press statements from PM Erdogan and FM Gul denying that there had been such a shift in policy, Talabani replied that Turkish MFA Iraq Coordinator Osman Koruturk had told him and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani about the change in policy but asked them to keep it private, explaining that Turkish officials needed time to prepare Turkish public opinion for the shift. When Barzani went public with it, Talabani explained, the Turks felt they had to deny it, but Gul had not done so in his meeting with Talabani that day. (On June 23, MFA Middle East Deputy Director General Safak Gokturk confirmed to us that the GOT accepted a federal structure in Iraq, but claimed this was not a change of policy). Talabani told us that he said to Gul the new Iraq had to rest on four pillars: democracy, human rights, federalism, and equal citizenship, and that Gul had agreed. Talabani said the letter Gul had sent to him and Barzani after the Feb. 1 terrorist attacks in Irbil, and the visits he made to those wounded in the attacks when they were being treated in Turkish hospitals had helped usher in a new era of cooperation.

Talabani Proposes Joint Committee to Solve PKK Problem

¶3. (S/NF) Talabani told us that Gul had not asked for any specific PUK action against the PKK/KADEK/KONGRA-GEL, but that Talabani had declared that the PUK publicly condemned any violent PKK action against Turkey. Talabani informed the FM that, according to his information, of the 224 attendees at the recent PKK/KONGRA-GEL congress in northern Iraq, 140 voted against continuing the armed struggle with Turkey. For the first time, many were refusing to return to Turkey to carry out operations. The Syrian Kurds in the PKK wanted to return home to Syria. And Osman Ocalan was in Mosul with 17 other former PKK leaders. We asked Talabani if he or other PUK reps were in touch with Ocalan. Talabani replied that the PUK would not have contact with him out of deference to Turkish sensitivities, but that the U.S. was in contact with Ocalan. Talabani then asked if we knew how Abdullah Ocalan was able to get messages from a Turkish prison out to northern Iraq since he was closely guarded and Turkey controlled everyone to whom he had access. Talabani said he told Gul that there needed to be a political solution to the problem of the PKK presence in northern Iraq, and proposed to Gul the establishment of a joint committee including the PUK, the KDP and Turkey, plus possibly the U.S. and UK, to explore

possible solutions. Gul was positive toward the concept, according to Talabani. (Gokturk did not mention this proposal to us when discussing Talabani's visit).

Talabani Lectures Gul on Kirkuk, Suggests Fact-Finding

14. (C) Gokturk, whose debrief on the Gul-Talabani meeting tracked closely with what Talabani told us, told PolCouns and PolMilCouns that Gul had been firm with Talabani about Kirkuk, saying that there were two things the Turks knew for certain: the Kurds were trying to change the demographic balance there, and that Kurdish militia were actively moving around Kirkuk, though the Turks did not necessarily believe that the militia would take any action any time soon. Nonetheless, their presence increased fears and concerns which could "trigger something." Talabani told PolMilOff that he had spoken at length with Gul about the situation in Kirkuk, about which, he told us, Gul knew very little. He told Gul that to rectify the damage done by Saddam's eviction of Kurds and Turkmen from the area and importation of Arabs from other regions, the "Arabization" Arabs would have to move out. The Kurds and Turkmen that had been evicted had to be allowed back. This was not about taking over Kirkuk by changing demographics, it was about restoring the status quo ante. He told us Gul listened carefully without pushing back as Talabani explained this. Talabani suggested to Gul that if Turkish officials wanted to really know what was going on in Kirkuk, Turkey should send a fact-finding team there. He said Gul was interested in doing so.

Turkmen Weakness Not America's Fault

15. (S/NF) Talabani told us that Gul complained the U.S. had failed to help the Turkmen secure their political rights. Talabani said he agreed the Turkmen had not achieved their political due, but claimed he had objected to the idea that this was America's fault. He said he told Gul that the reason the Turkmen, and the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) in particular, were not well represented in Iraqi political structures was because they had adopted confrontational positions towards the coalition as well as all the former Iraqi opposition leaders, many of whom have been running Iraq with the coalition for the past year. Instead, the ITF had allied with Islamist extremists and former Saddam supporters.

Thus, the ITF had put themselves on the wrong side of the political divide in Iraq. Talabani said repeatedly that it seemed the Turkmen Front's main political program was to confront the Kurds. "They received poor political guidance from here," he told us. This approach would not help them improve their political stature in the new Iraq. They had failed to form even one alliance with a group that had a leading political role, even though they knew many of the individuals well from opposition conferences. Talabani explained to Gul that he personally had inserted language in the TAL about Turkmen rights and had tried to get the Turkmen included in opposition leadership positions in the months before the war. "And after we tried to help them, look at how they behave toward us," he said. He also shared with Gul information found in Baghdad implicating former ITF leader Sanan Aga as an agent of Saddam. Talabani told us that at the end of the meeting, FM Gul told Talabani he had learned a lot. (Gokturk asserted to us that Ankara was advising Iraqi Turkmen leaders that in the new Iraq, they should become active in domestic politics as Iraqis and stop asking for "external assistance.")

16. (U) On June 23, Talabani met PM Erdogan, MFA Undersecretary Ziyal, EU Ambassadors and TNIO and TGS representatives. According to press accounts, Talabani raised with PM Erdogan the idea of establishing joint committees to "probe allegations about northern Iraq," but Erdogan did not offer a clear response. The press also reports Talabani saying the Kurds wanted a joint Kurdish, Turkmen and Arab administration in Kirkuk, and a special status for the city.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN